



# FOCUSING ON IXCÁN

EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE IXCÁN REGION OF GUATEMALA

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## AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE LIVES

By Dr. Grace Anderson

My first trip to Guatemala was in August 2017 as a third-year optometry student. The week in Ixcán gave me a diverse clinic experience and memories I will never forget—I knew I wanted to go back. After six years, I was able to return for my second trip in August of this year, this time as an optometrist (with only a slight improvement in my Spanish). When I landed in Guatemala City I was filled with nostalgia and couldn't wait to make the trek north to spend the week in Playa Grande.



Grace

Our group included four doctors, six students, and two volunteers. We joined forces with Enfoque Ixcán health promoters for three days of clinic and one training day with the local staff. We saw 650 patients and referred 52 for sight-restoring surgeries. At the end of clinic days, my body would be tired, but my face was the sorest from smiling so much. The people of Ixcán are some of the most kind and appreciative individuals I have met. Some patients would travel 2-3 hours to reach our clinic and wait many more hours for an exam. The clinic provides a much-needed service to an area that otherwise does not have access to eye care, and the people of Ixcán value this so much.

A difficult habit with many healthcare providers is letting the cons outweigh the pros. That is, difficult or heart-wrenching cases can reside in your memory more than the joyful successes. Many challenging cases have silver linings though, providing answers and peace of mind to patients. They also create a connection of compassion even though problems may not be “fixed” in a traditional sense.



Grace examines a patient.

Many patients stood out to me this trip. One being a 28-year-old woman who travelled two hours to Playa with complaints of vision loss in both eyes. Accompanying her were her two young daughters, full of shy smiles and curiosity. Initially, it was reported the woman recently lost vision after falling and hitting her head on a rock. After further discussion, her vision had been decreased for 6 months following a presumed stroke after a fall. Her vision was severely affected; she had to hold her cell phone about three inches from her face to see her screen, though it still was not clear at that distance. Her daughters helped her navigate her surroundings and read and respond to text messages.

She had previously seen a neurologist and came to see the providers at Enfoque Ixcán in hopes of having her vision restored. During her exam, both of her optic nerves had evidence of previous ischemia (lack of blood flow and oxygen) which caused dysfunction of the nerves and subsequent vision loss. This type of damage to the nerve is irreversible and there are currently no treatments to recover or regenerate the lost tissue. Telling her the prognosis was extremely difficult. Her daughters were at her side looking between their mother's disheartened face and the faces of the doctors as we gave her the unfortunate news.

One of the doctors on the trip had received a donation of low vision devices to help in situations such as this. Though we could not restore her vision, high-powered reading glasses allowed her to see her phone screen clearly for the first time in months. The clarity of the image was evident on her face, a small smile forming at the corners of her mouth when she looked at her phone. Though we could not save or restore her vision completely, providing answers and tools would give her some level of normalcy.

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### ENFOQUE IXCÁN

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*Continued from page 1* Trips like this put so many things into perspective for me. Something as simple as a pair of reading glasses can change someone’s life. I have seen many patients cry tears of joy knowing they can read, sew, farm, or cook again. I cry right along with them. My profession gives me the opportunity to help the lives of many people, not only in my community in Oregon but across the globe. I am fortunate to be a part of Enfoque Ixcán and Pacific University’s Amigos Eye Care program and anticipate many more trips to Guatemala during my career.

**TIME**

*By Dr. Scott Pike*

Pedro Chom and I started Enfoque Ixcán almost 27 years ago!

Where did the time go? Well, it went to the 23,200 patients we have served with eye exams. It went to the 10,600 people who received a pair of glasses and who have found the comfort and clarity in their reading, studying, and more productive work lives.

It went to the 820, mostly elderly, folks who had sight restoring cataract surgeries. They are now able to enjoy the interaction eyesight allows them to have with their family and friends. This allows them to move about in their communities safely; going to church, working in their gardens, watching television, helping to prepare meals in the kitchen. In other words, improved eyesight gives dignity, quality of life, and a purpose for living.

My hope is that Enfoque Ixcán will continue to serve the eye care needs of the poor in Ixcán for another 27 years. But I’m not going to see that happen. I don’t expect to live to be 106 years old, maybe 100.

To keep this project moving for the next 27 or more years, my wife and I have designated 10% of our worth, when we’ve passed, as a bequest to Enfoque Ixcán. ***I invite you to join us.***

- Dr. Scott Pike, President & Founder
- Dwight Fleck, Treasurer
- Dr. Brian Arvidson, Secretary
- Ali Durbin, Member
- Dr. Jessica Lynch, Member
- Amanda Terhes, Member
- Anna Wisdom, Amigos Rep ‘23

**COUNCIL OF ELECTORS**

- J. Eric Anderson
- Dr. Craig Bowen
- Dr. Shannon Currier
- James Harrison Pike II
- Joene Pike
- Connie Running
- Dr. Craig Stout

Many of you have a long history of support for Enfoque Ixcán. You’ve shown an interest and trust in our mission of providing basic eye care and eye health education to an underserved, remote region of Guatemala. The results have been amazing and quite visible in the lives of the people we serve. **You** can take pride in that.

To build and protect our sustainability we need a strong, growing endowment to maintain this important work during the inevitable low revenue periods. This is the ideal long-term gift for donors of modest means. That’s because there’s no lifetime cost, just donate a little of what’s left over. It can be a set amount or a percentage, like Joene and I are giving.

And, it’s very easy to set up. Your attorney, if you’re using one, just needs our name, address, our non-profit ID number and your choice of how much to give. If you have a question, you can call me.

Time marches on. Keep the clock ticking. Become a part of a group of passionate and determined supporters. With your help, Pedro and I intend for Enfoque Ixcán to also continue ticking.

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***Pedro and Scott discuss Enfoque Ixcán plans***



***Scott and Joene at Lachua Preserve not far from the clinic in Playa Grande***



## AUGUST 2023 ENFOQUE IXCÁN / AMIGOS EYE CARE MISSION TRIP

By Dr. Jessica A Lynch

In August, I had the immense pleasure of accompanying three doctors, six Amigos students, a Spanish translator, and my husband on a journey to Playa Grande, Guatemala for the 20th collaboration between Amigos Eye Care and Enfoque Ixcán. It was a journey filled with reunions, new experiences, and the joy of making a meaningful impact on the lives of the Ixcán people.

What made this trip particularly special was that all three of the doctors were former Amigos alums, and two of them had previously been on Guatemala trips with Dr. Pike as students. It marked my second time leading the trip and my sixth visit to Guatemala. I was thrilled to share the beauty of Guatemala with our group and introduce them to its warm and generous people.

Our journey began with everyone flying into the capital and spending a night in Guatemala City. Early on Sunday morning, we set out for Playa Grande, stopping for lunch in Cobán before reaching our hotel in Playa Grande in time for dinner. Waiting for us at the hotel were all three of our Enfoque Ixcán Eye Health Promoters, and it was heartwarming to see their smiling faces and catch up with them about their work and families.



*The 3 EI Health Promoters (with Scott last June)*



*Spanish books*

The next morning, our mission started at the Santa Teresita clinic at the Catholic Church compound, where people had been patiently waiting for hours to receive eye exams. On that first day, we saw approximately 200 patients.

The following day, we bussed two hours south of Playa Grande to the village of San Juan Chactelá. I forgot to tell the cook that we were leaving early, but no problem, we ate our pancakes in the bus on the way! We primarily saw school children, teachers, and elderly villagers.

Ahead of our trip, we had collected new and used Spanish-language children's books to donate to the school in San Juan Chactelá since they had no library. The school's principal was overjoyed to receive our gifts.

We capped off the day with a visit to the breathtaking Los Copones waterfalls, where we swam under the waterfalls while the rain poured down, creating a beautiful memory.

On Wednesday, the doctors dedicated a day to training the Eye Health Promoters at our Enfoque Ixcán clinic, while the students enjoyed a day of rest and explored the local markets. Thursday marked our final day of seeing patients at Santa Teresita clinic. In total, we provided eye care to 650 individuals. Out of these, fifty-two were referred for eye surgery, with the majority needing cataract surgery.

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*The team of Doctors, Amigos students, volunteers, & Felipe*



*One group of cataract surgery patients referred by the August team.*



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*AUGUST 2023 ENFOQUE IXCÁN / AMIGOS EYE CARE MISSION TRIP*

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I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for supporting our project. Our entire team of doctors, students, and auxiliary staff found this mission trip to be an incredible, life changing experience. We not only got to know a new country and culture but also made new friends. Together, we are changing lives, one eye at a time.

***Thank you for your unwavering support.***

**THE IMPACT OF YOUR DONATIONS**

By Dr. Scott Pike and Dr. Jessica A Lynch

If you picture a cataract patient, an older person usually comes to mind, right? That’s not always the case. Children can have cataracts, too. One of our cataract patients in August was Elvi, a 4 year old, who had been in an accident which resulted in a traumatic cataract in her right eye. Elvi’s parents were concerned about her reduced vision, so they brought her to our Enfoque Ixcán clinic.



***Elvi post surgery***

The seriousness of Elvi’s problem was immediately evident to our Eye Health Promoters who accompanied her to the surgical eye hospital in San Benito, Petén, a five hour drive away. It was a complex surgery, but the doctors were successful in restoring her vision back to normal.

Can you imagine the anxiety and then the relief that Elvi's parents must have felt when they learned that Elvi's blindness could be cured? ***It's moments like these that remind us of the profound impact of our work and the importance of your support.***

**THANK YOU!!**